The BROWNIES IN SWITZERLAND

by Carine Cadby

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The BROWNIES IN SWITZERLAND

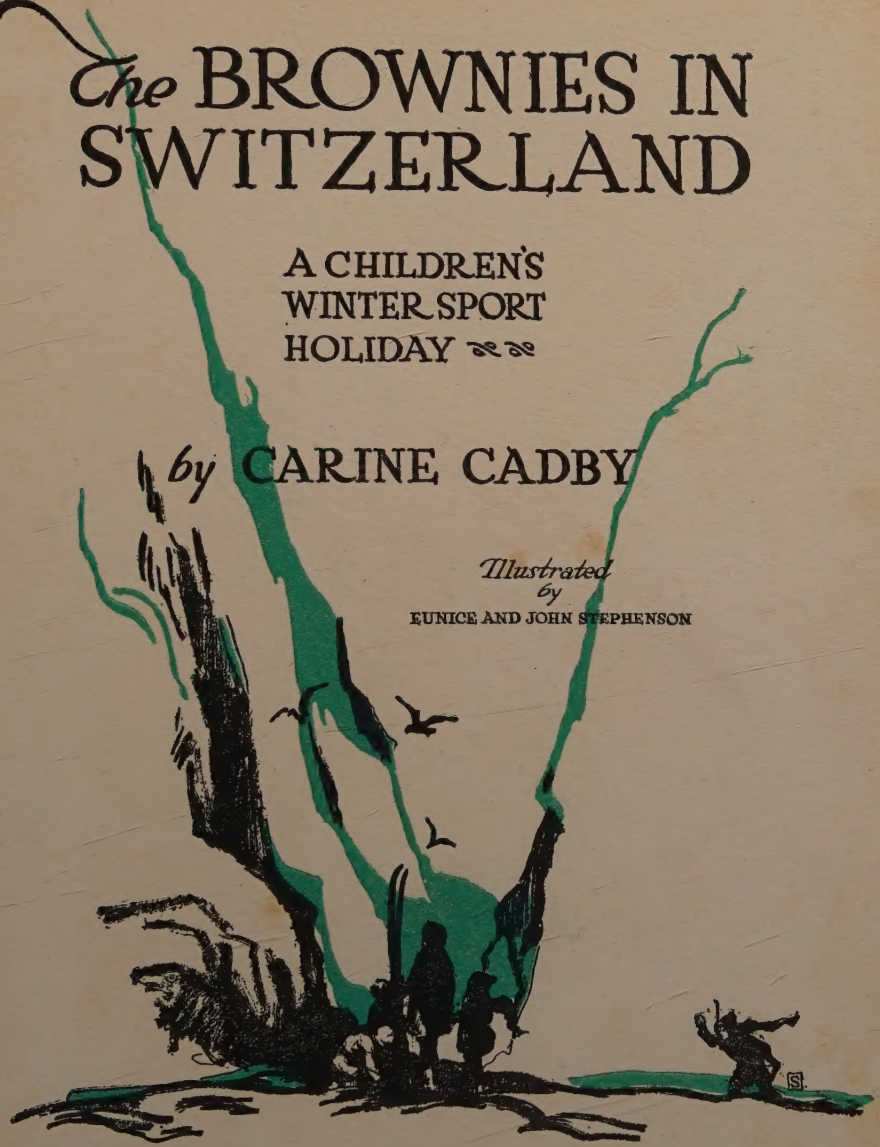
AND WHEN THEY LOOKED INTO THE CAVE THEY SAW, NOT FAIRIES NOR EVEN DWARFS, BUT TWO CHILDREN

The BROWNIES IN SWITZERLAND

A CHILDREN'S WINTER SPORT HOLIDAY

by CARINE CADBY

Illustrated by
EUNICE AND JOHN STEPHENSON



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And when they looked into the cave they saw, not fairies nor even dwarfs, but two children . *Frontispiece*

He made them all take hands and race across the rink as fast as ever they could go . . . . *Facing p.* 18

"Isn't it like Fairyland?" Jean whispered to Nickie . . . . . " " 36

"Here come the Brownies!" he cried . . . . " " 48

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He hardly ever let go her hand . . . . . " " 116

THE BOOK SPEAKS

WHETHER your name is Barbara or Mary Elizabeth, or Tom or Dick (it really does not matter), I do hope we are going to be the very best of friends. I am sure you will not find me hard to understand. Father and mother may have to explain a few of my words, for, although they have been carefully selected for your ears, words often come from foreign countries, and in making them our own we have not always changed their dress so that young readers can recognize them at a glance.

I should like nothing better than to have you take me off into a corner, where we could be alone, and have you read my printed pages aloud. I have strange secrets to tell; and if you will treat me kindly I will share them all with you.

I have many friends among the books. Some of them have been in the same families for years. They have received the care which good books deserve, and I am sure they are very grateful. I have other friends, however, who have had a most unhappy life. Their pages have been torn, their backs have been broken (perhaps you did not

know that books have backs); often they have been given away, or made to live in a dusty attic or damp cellar.

I feel sure that the boys and girls who treat their book friends so badly do so through carelessness; but if you should ask father and mother, I believe they would agree with me that the hurt which is given unthinkingly causes quite as much unhappiness as the one that is given intentionally.

Books are the truest friends a boy or girl can have; they give everything and ask little in return. In the years to come, when you are no longer boy or girl, you will prize our companionship and realize fully how unfailingly we served you. Why not show your playmates how such good friends should be treated by the care you take of me?

I

THE FIRST DAY

NICKIE had never enjoyed anything more than the journey to Switzerland. It was better even than a party. A ship takes you across the sea, and then you travel in a train. you go on and on and on, and the railway carriage becomes a little home. The meals are served in another railway carriage full of little tables; and as the train jolts along, you eat your dinner and look out of the window at strange country flying past. You stop some-

times at a station, and the engine gives a loud long hoot and then a big giant sigh, as if it were very tired, but on you go again, till it gets dark and you look out of the window and see the moon shining.

At night, Nickie was put to bed on the seat of the railway carriage, wrapped in a rug. She slept till the morning, and when she woke up she was in Switzerland. It was a wonderful adventure.

Nickie's real name was Nicolete but she was only called that when people were not quite pleased with her. She was five, and the youngest of four little girls. Their father was a long way off across the sea and their mother was taking them to Switzerland for their Christmas holidays. They were always dressed in brown knickerbocker suits just alike, so people used to call them the Brownies.

Erica was the eldest. She was tall and fair, rather grave, and a little inclined to be grown-up, but Nickie loved her because she was kind and never let her be teased. Then came Cicely, like a boy and full of mischief. Nickie couldn't help liking her, although she was often naughty, because she was such fun. Jean, however, was Nickie's favourite, she was nearest to her in age and they went together. Jean was fat and good-tempered and always ready to laugh. She was clever too, for she could make up

poetry. Not real poetry, of course, but quite good enough for Nickie, who thought Jean a wonder. So you see Nickie was really fond of them all, and as she was rather a darling, they loved her too.

It was their second morning in Switzerland and Jean was singing:

"Nickie wake or you'll be late,
And that you'll hate for we're going to skate."

It was nice to be roused by poetry and still better to wake up and know you were in Switzerland.

A Swiss friend of Mother's, called Fräulein, had come to be with the children, and she soon helped Nickie to get dressed. Fräulein had crinkled fair hair and a nice face, somehow Nickie liked her at once, and so did the others. Her father had been a clergyman in the village, so Fräulein knew every one.

The Brownies were staying in a hotel: an enormous house with heaps and heaps of rooms, you simply couldn't count them, where lots of other people were staying too. It was a little like a beehive, and people kept buzzing in and out of the big door rather like bees. The Brownies went down to breakfast in the great dining-room, where there were rows of little tables. There was a waiter and

ever so many waitresses, who were very nice. Nickie heard afterwards that they were called "Daughters of the Dining Room." The daughter who waited on the Brownies was called Anna and she spoke English quite well. After their porridge, they had little crusty rolls, instead of ordinary bread and butter, and honey too, which, though nice, is very sticky, so that you have to be rather careful with it.

After breakfast, Fräulein took them out. At first, they were almost dazzled, for everything was light. The sky was as blue as the eyes of Nickie's new doll, and everywhere it was brilliantly white with snow. Great lumps of it sat on the roofs and on any place where it could lodge. The road, too, was all snow, but beaten down and frozen so that you could walk on it, though you had to be a little careful not to slip down. All around were enormous mountains, rugged and pointed, and so high that they reached right up into the blue sky. On their slopes grew forests of Christmas trees, all covered thick with snow, and dotted about were the queerest little brown houses. Nickie was told they were called chalets, but they looked more like toys. A river ran through the village, dark and rushing, and close to it grew lovely white trees that might have been made of lace. And along the

white road came horses and sleighs, with jingling bells as if Santa Claus were driving up.

Nickie had always believed in fairies, and now she thought she must have got to Fairyland. Everything was so different; so beautiful and exciting.

"Is it Fairyland?" she whispered to Jean.

Jean was rather puzzled herself; "Mother *said* it was Switzerland," she answered, "but it does seem very fairy-like, so bright and silvery."

"And look at those little houses," cried Nickie. "I wonder who lives in them. Do you think they might be fairies?"

"No, brown bears, or perhaps dwarfs," said Jean. "I think fairies would rather live out of doors."

"Then mightn't we see them?" asked Nickie.

"No, they would probably live in little snow or ice caves," said Jean, "so that they could play about in the sunshine and run and hide if any one came along."

"But wouldn't they be very cold at night?"

"No, you see they would be snow fairies, so they could use the snow like a blanket and just creep under it if they felt cold."

Nickie was going to ask ever so many more questions about the snow fairies but they had reached the skating rink.

II

THE SKATING RINK

THE skating rink was an enormous bit of smooth ice. A merry band was playing and lots of people were gliding about the rink. Only the three elder Brownies were to skate, as Mother thought Nickie rather too young. They had brought their skates with them, screwed on to their boots, but they were so excited they could hardly sit still to get them put on. Nickie had never

seen a pair of skates before, and it seemed very clever to her that any one could even stand up on things whose edge was like the blade of a knife. Mother was on the rink and Nickie thought she looked like a bird, she swooped about so gracefully. She skated up to help her children, but as she only had two hands the one who was left alone was always falling down. Nickie was sorry for poor Jean, who was having some very hard bumps on the ice, but Fräulein said Jean would soon get on, she had courage and was not afraid of trying, and every one tumbled at first.

Fräulein and Nickie sat outside a little wooden Pavilion. There was so much to watch and the sun was shining so gaily that Nickie felt she could be happy sitting there all day. It was fun to see the different skaters, but there was one who did most wonderful things. Sometimes he would dash right across the rink with one arm and one leg stretched out, next time you looked he would be spinning round like a top, and then, perhaps, he would be dancing with some lady or skating round with a child. He reminded Nickie of the harlequin at the Pantomime, and she loved watching him. He looked so handsome and clever too, and was always active and doing something interesting. To her great surprise, she saw him skating over to Erica and talking to her.

"Fräulein, Fräulein, look!" she cried, "look! the harlequin is talking to Erica," and before Fräulein could answer, there he was actually skating away with the eldest Brownie.

"Yes," said Fräulein, "he is giving her a lesson, your mother arranged it this morning; he is a splendid teacher."

Lucky Erica! there she was holding both his hands crossed and skating away with him. How nice they looked! He was making her skate quite fast too and strike out. Why she might almost pass for a real skater.

The Brownies were not the only children on the rink. Fräulein counted eight for Nickie: two little boys who were twins, two girls and a boy who could skate very well. He looked rather nice, Nickie thought, and she noticed he helped Jean up when she fell down and tried to teach her to skate.

When Erica had had her skating lesson, the harlequin took Cicely round and gave her a lesson, and then he played games with the children. It was nearly luncheon time and the rink was getting empty, so there was plenty of room. He made them all take hands each side of him and race right across the rink as fast as ever they could go. Then he would dash back and pick up those who had fallen. It was great fun and there were shouts of

HE MADE THEM ALL TAKE HANDS AND RACE ACROSS THE RINK
AS FAST AS EVER THEY COULD GO

laughter. The children kept calling out: "Once more, oh! just once more!"

Nickie had felt quite happy looking on, but this was too much for her, she felt so out of it. "Oh, Fräulein, can't I skate too?" she begged.

"But you are so small, my treasure," said Fräulein; "besides you have no skates."

Before a tear had time to squeeze out of Nickie's eye, Fräulein told her to look round, and there she saw a boy who gave her such a jolly smile that she had to smile back. She had seen him on the rink helping Jean but he had been home and changed and got his ski. Fräulein called him up and spoke to him, and then the others came and everyone talked about skating.

"But why are *you* not skating?" the boy asked Nickie.

However, before another tear could squeeze out, Fräulein explained that Nickie was going to skate as soon as she was a little older, and Jean laughed and said she had saved herself some bruises.

"Besides," said Cicely, "her nickname is Sprat, and sprats don't skate."

"But our sprat will very soon," Erica broke in, "and when she does she will have three of us to help her."

So Nickie felt quite cheerful again, and as they were

walking back to the hotel, Fräulein told them about the boy. His name was Peter, he lived quite near their hotel in lodgings, and he had been to Switzerland in winter twice before. "I know you will like him," she said, "because he is always so jolly and good-natured. He wants very much to teach you ski-ing and hopes you will all go a trip with him."

"What fun!" said Cicely. "I do hope we shall ski."

III

TOBOGGANING

IF you went to Switzerland in winter I know you would love tobogganing. A toboggan is a little wooden sledge with steel runners, which slip over the snow so smoothly that it is no weight at all to pull along. And, of course, when you sit on it to go downhill, it just runs of itself. Where the snow is hard and frosty, it simply races away with you. But you need not be afraid, for you can

easily stop it by putting your feet on the ground. By steering it with your feet, too, you can make it go just where you like, which is why tobogganing is such fun.

Swiss children are very clever at tobogganing; they get such a lot of practice with their snowy winters. The boys toboggan all sorts of different ways: sitting, lying, or head foremost on the sledge, and kneeling with one foot stuck out behind to give a push where the ground is level.

The Brownies used to watch the children going off to school in the mornings before eight o'clock, dragging their toboggans behind them. In the afternoons they would come racing home downhill and shouting: "Achtung!" or "Sorg!" which means "Look out!" if there was anything in the way. Wherever Swiss children go they seem to take their toboggans. If they are sent errands, to buy a long loaf of bread or some milk in a tin can, they can toboggan down the steepest hill without dropping the loaf or spilling a drop of milk. In a hilly place like Switzerland, where it is always either up or down, a toboggan can be very useful.

The Brownies had brought out skates, but they had no toboggan, and they longed to go out with the other children. They were delighted when Fräulein told them that there were a lot of toboggans at the hotel and they could

borrow one. The next morning she took them to a shed where they were kept and a nice man picked them out a good one, which he promised would run well.

He tied a little rope on to the toboggan to pull it by, and the Brownies went off at once to try it. It would be great fun, they thought, for three to sit on, and for one to be the horse and drag them along, but at first each wanted to be the one to pull. Cicely and Jean were the worst, they got quite excited about it.

"I'll pull," said Cicely, "I am older than you."

"But I'm just as strong," said Jean, trying to get hold of the rope.

"No, you shan't," cried Jean, giving her a push.

"Selfish pig," shouted Cicely, pushing back.

Erica, however, didn't encourage quarrels, and she cut this one short by taking the rope herself. "Get on," she said to the others, "and don't be such sillies. If there is any more fuss, Nickie, and I will go off alone with the toboggan, won't we, Sprat?"

After that, they soon made it up and sat on with Nickie while Erica pulled. She made a splendid horse and stepped out well. Nickie shouted, "Hui, Hui," which is the Swiss for "Gee up!"

When Fräulein heard about the quarrel, she took them

back to the shed again and asked the nice man to pick them out another good running toboggan, so that they might have two. Then she arranged that Erica and Cicely should sit together on one and Jean and Nickie on the other. Jean was very good! she was soon able to race the others. Cicely told her it was because she was so fat and such a heavy weight, but Jean really understood the steering better, and was not afraid of the steepest hill.

One day when Mother was having tea with them, Fräulein told the Brownies that there were going to be some toboggan races for children.

"Oh, what fun!" said Jean.

"Are they only for Swiss children?" asked Erica.

"Oh, no," Fräulein answered, "the races are for every one, and visitor children can go in for them too. There are going to be several classes: for boys and girls, different ages, and for singles and doubles, which means two or one on each toboggan."

"Then can we race too?" asked Jean.

"I am afraid you wouldn't stand a chance of winning," said Mother, "you've been here such a short time. Look what a lot of practice the other children have had."

"But it would be such fun to try," said Jean. "Oh, do let us?"

"We could practise hard," said Erica.

"And Jean is so good," added Nickie.

"Very well, then," said Mother at last, "but only two of you must go in, we can't face four coming in last! How would it be if Erica and Jean try for the doubles?"

Jean was very glad to have been chosen, but she asked if she might have Nickie for a partner instead of Erica.

"But Erica will be such a help," said Mother.

Jean explained, however, that she was so used to Nickie, who just sat still and didn't interfere, while Erica was too fond of putting her feet down and braking. So as Jean was really the best, it was settled that she and Nickie should give in their names for the race.

Nickie felt very proud, you may guess. She loved going with Jean, and what fun it would be if they really did win the race. After all, Mother didn't know how fast Jean could go.

After tea, of course, Jean came in for some teasing.

"Look out for accidents," said Erica; "take care you don't smash up our Sprat."

"Don't bother about accidents," said Cicely, "what you have to do is to win. If you don't I'll give you a snow bed and an icicle hot water bottle."

"You had better not get any fatter," warned Erica.

"No, or you'll break the toboggan," said Cicely.

Jean, however, took no notice, she was quite happy at the thought of the race.

"You will have to practise a lot before next week," said Fräulein, "and you must be really careful on the track."

When Erica and Cicely were going to bed, Jean burst in on them from her room, which was next door. She had been in bed half an hour but had spent the time in making up a verse. This is what she said to them:

"You can keep your jokes and jeers,
And your foolish little fears.
Nickie and Jean are going to race,
Come and see them go the pace.
Neither are silly, conceited or rash
And so there probably won't be a smash."

and then she dashed out.

"That doesn't tell us anything about winning," Cicely called after her.

IV

SNOW CASTLES AND INDOOR SKI-ING

THERE were always plenty of people skating on the rink but many more went off ski-ing. Ski are long, narrow, strong slats of wood strapped to your boots, and you carry a pair of sticks with discs at the end of them to prevent their slipping right into the snow. With ski on, you can slide over the snow and go anywhere, even if it is ever so deep. If you tried to walk on it you

would sink in, sometimes up to your waist, but ski can keep you on the top of it. Running downhill on ski is almost like flying, you slip along so quietly and quickly. Of course, at first you generally slip down! however the snow is soft, ski-ing falls don't hurt, and every one is bound to have a few tumbles at first. No one minds, they are just part of the fun.

When you meet people out ski-ing, it is often puzzling to tell if they are men or women, for now all the ladies wear trousers or knickerbockers. They found skirts were a bother and even dangerous.

The Brownies were very keen to ski. Their mother was a good ski-er and went out on ski-ing expeditions nearly every day. They all had knickerbocker suits and the right kind of boots, so they only wanted a pair of ski each. They could do without sticks, they said, for lots of children are not allowed to use them. When they begged Mother to let them ski, she told them she had already ordered ski for Erica and Cicely.

You may guess how proud they were. They would be able to go off ski-ing like the grown-ups. Jean and Nickie grumbled a little, but Cicely laughed and told them their legs were too short, they would never get along. "Not much shorter than yours," Jean answered back, but the

elder ones were too busy talking to each other to notice her.

"I'll race you," said Erica.

"All right, I'll let you have a good start," Cicely answered.

"I expect I shall go trips with Mother," Erica went on.

"Well, anyhow, you will both do a lot of tumbling down," Jean put in.

"Like the two new ladies," said Nickie.

"No," said Fräulein, "there is no need to keep on falling like that if you know what to do, so to-day while Jean and Nickie are playing in the snow, we will go and watch the ski-ers."

So off they went to the Nursery Slopes, which is where the beginners practise. It was amusing seeing them trying to do different turns and tumbling down. They appeared to be having a lot of fun and no one got hurt, though some of them got up covered with snow looking like polar bears. What interested the children most was a little boy with a very small pair of ski who was being taught by his father. He could not have been more than four, and he was learning to do a kick-turn which is very useful if you want to turn round. The father seemed rather strict, the children thought, but Fräulein told them

he was one of the very best ski-ers, so of course he wanted his little son to grow up a good ski-er too.

While the others were away Jean and Nickie went out to play in the snow. It was rather like playing on the sands at the sea-side. The children have wooden spades, larger and flatter than sea-side ones; and after a fresh fall of snow they can make all kinds of things. Some children build a snow man, or a big animal, or even a little house. The Brownies had tried to build a snow castle. Fräulein had started it for them when the snow was soft, and Jean and Nickie worked at it now. To-day the snow was rather hard but they were able to make some steps at the back of it, up which Nickie climbed and at the top sang, "I'm the King of the Castle," while Jean threw lumps of snow at her. Then Jean climbed up and was "king," and very soon the others came home, when all the talk was of ski-ing.

Just before bed-time there was a great excitement. The new ski arrived, all ready to fit on to Erica's and Cicely's boots. "I do wish we could go out *now* and try," asked Erica, to which Mother said a firm "No." Then Cicely asked if they might have the ski in their bedroom, and when Mother tucked them up that night there was a pair of ski leaning against each bed. When she went into the

next room to kiss her two youngest, she promised that when they got a little older they should ski too.

And now I must tell you what that naughty Cicely did. The next morning she woke up quite early, before it was light. She turned on the electric light just to look at her ski. But looking was not enough, and she longed to try them on, so she got out of bed and put on her boots. You may guess what a noise this made, for in Switzerland many of the bedrooms are without carpets. Then, worse still, she tried to fasten on the ski. Clap, clap, clap, it went on the floor as she tried to stamp her foot into the ski fastening. Erica woke up frightened, she thought the house was falling down. Cicely didn't seem to know what a noise she was making, she was trying so hard to get the ski to keep on the boot. She took no notice of Erica, who kept begging her to be quiet. Presently, they heard cross-sounding voices and electric bells down the corridor kept ringing in an angry way. Then there was a knock at their door and Paula, the maid, said a good deal they didn't understand.

"Go away," Cicely called, "I'm busy," and then, stamping her boot into the ski, she tried again to fasten it.

After that, more bells rang furiously, and there was more talking, quite loud this time. Then Mother burst

into the room. "Take your boots off at once," she called to Cicely, "and get into bed. You are waking everybody up and the people below are most annoyed." Cicely quickly got out of her boots and hopped into bed feeling very ashamed. "I didn't think," she murmured. "No, but you should," said Mother; "if you behave like this we shall all be turned out of the hotel." Then Mother went on to explain that being in an hotel was different from being at home, where there are no people underneath. "It is very bad mannered not to think of other people," Mother went on, "and no one wants to be woke up at six o'clock in the morning."

"I really am sorry, Mother," said Cicely; "I won't do it again."

"I'm glad to hear you say so," said Mother, "but you will have to go to the rooms below after breakfast, and say the same to the poor people you have disturbed."

Cicely didn't like her task, but she knew when Mother spoke like that it had to be done. It was not quite as bad as she had expected however, for little Nickie asked to go too, and the gentleman who had sounded most angry turned out to be quite funny and made jokes about "Indoor ski-ing, the new parlour game." "It might be quite a

success," he said, "if only someone could invent a silencer."

After this he became a friend of the Brownies, who always called him the "Indoor Ski-ing Gentleman."

V

CHRISTMAS

AT home the Brownies had always looked forward to Christmas Day, but in Switzerland it is on Christmas Eve that Santa Claus comes and brings the presents. They did not know this and so when they got up on Christmas Eve they were very surprised to hear from Fräulein that the real Christmas would be to-day. Santa Claus was going to bring the presents and there would be a big tree in the lounge.

"But what about our stockings?" asked Jean. "Shan't we have to hang them up?"

Then Fräulein told them that it was only in England that Santa Claus expected to find stockings, in Switzerland he just walked in and put the presents on the table.

"But doesn't he come down the chimney?" asked Nickie.

"No," said Fräulein, "there are very few chimneys in Switzerland. He drives along the road in a red and gold sleigh with real silver bells, but I am afraid you won't see him, because he never comes till it's dark."

Erica and Cicely laughed, and Cicely said she was sure they wouldn't see him, and last Christmas she had stayed awake and it was . . .

"Hurry, hurry," cried Fräulein, "and get dressed or you will be too late for your skating lesson."

That morning the sun went in and big clouds covered up all the blue of the sky. In the afternoon it began to snow. The flakes fell gently and steadily and soon covered up all the dark patches on the ground.

The people in the hotel could not understand why two of the Brownies sat on the window sill and watched the road. There was nothing to be seen through the double windows and it was a funny place to sit. But Jean and

Nickie were not going to lose a chance of seeing Santa Claus drive up in his red and gold sleigh. The snow got thicker and the wind sprang up and whirled it about in clouds, but there they sat till Fräulein found them and told them it was time to get ready for tea. They put on their party frocks, for it was to be a children's tea party. Peter had been invited and he sat between Jean and Nickie because his age was just between them. Cicely pretended to be very shy. She hung her head, took tiny mouthfuls and no one could make her speak. But when Peter said, "What a lot she's eating," she forgot and cried, "I'm sure I'm not," and every one laughed.

It was a delicious tea, with lots of cakes, and in the middle of the table was a little brown chalet with snow on the roof. It was really a cake with chocolate and white icing. Some nice grown-ups came and talked to the children, and the funny thing was when it grew dark no one would turn up the lights. They laughed and said Santa Claus had forbidden it. They all came out from tea into passages that were quite dark. The grown-ups took the children's hands and led them to the door of the lounge. Here they knocked and asked, "Has Santa Claus come yet?" "Yes," they heard some one call out, "he has been and left the presents." Wasn't it exciting waiting outside in the dark and

"ISN'T IT LIKE FAIRYLAND?" JEAN WHISPERED TO NICKIE

hearing that Santa Claus had really been! Suddenly the door was flung wide open. The light was so bright inside that at first the children were quite dazzled, but when they got in they saw a real giant Christmas tree reaching to the ceiling. I was lighted up with a hundred coloured candles, decorated with silvery stuff looking like frost, and glass drops that might have been icicles. There were gold and silver balls too, and little sausages, vegetables and loaves that were really sweets and lots and lots of toys. "Isn't it like Fairyland?" Jean whispered to Nickie, who was almost too excited to speak.

Near the tree was a table with a white cloth on which Santa Claus had put the children's presents. He must have been a very clever Santa Claus too, for he had written the children's names in gold on little tickets. Fräulein helped Nickie find hers. There was a wooden cow just like a real one, a pair of fur gloves, a cooking stove with aluminum saucepans, a toy chalet, and then a very heavy little parcel. Mother told her it was something Father had ordered especially for her. She was so excited she could hardly undo it; but when it was unwrapped, she gave a little cry of delight, for it was just what she wanted so badly: a little glittering pair of skates.

After the presents, Nickie didn't remember much more

about Christmas, except some games and being the first out in Musical Chairs, and then some beautiful singing, every one standing round the big Christmas tree. After that, her only recollection was Fräulein calling her "a dear little tired treasure" and carrying her off to bed.

VI

THE OLD WOMAN AND THE GOATS

"I DON'T like the feel of ski socks," said Erica, "they are so thick and rough and so horribly greasy."

"And so they ought to be," said Fräulein, "they have to be warm and keep out the damp. That is why they are made of goats' hair."

"But Fräulein," said Cicely, "how can they be made of goats' hair, it is so short."

"Do tell us something funny about ski socks," asked Jean, "or about goats, or make up a story."

The Brownies loved to get Fräulein to tell them nice odd things about Switzerland, for she knew such a lot and it was all so strange to them.

So Fräulein began telling them how the goats' hair had first of all to be spun, and she promised to take them to see an old woman who kept goats and had a spinning wheel on which the goats' hair was spun into yarn, which her daughters and granddaughters knitted into ski socks.

That same afternoon the Brownies started off with their toboggans and Fräulein took them to the very last house in the village where the old woman lived. It was a brown wooden chalet like one in a fairy tale, and the old woman might have come out of a fairy tale too. She had a face almost as brown as her house and covered with wrinkles. They looked as if they had been made by smiling, for it was a kind face and her eyes were very merry. She said a great deal which they couldn't understand, but she pointed to seats for them to sit down on and smiled at them, so they knew she was pleased to see them.

The room was like a big wooden box. The walls, floor and ceiling were all of the same kind of wood. It was very clean and a big wood-burning stove that stood right

out in the room made it rather warm. Close to the window was the spinning wheel and near it some fluffy looking heaps of wool, which they were told was "carded" and ready to be spun.

All at once they heard noises coming from the next room and wondered whatever it could be. There were stamps and grunts and sounds that seemed to come from animals. The old woman saw their puzzled faces, so she hobbled across the room and opened the door, and what do you think they saw? A nice comfortable stable full of goats! She laughed at their surprise and began telling them stories about her animals. Fräulein put what she said into English. One goat, called Hilda, was very naughty and fond of getting her own way. "Impudent and headstrong," the old woman said. Once this impudent goat had pushed her way into the wooden-box room and had eaten all the old woman's dinner, which had just been put ready for her on the table.

Another time, Hilda had gone for a walk by herself. She pushed and pushed at the bolt on the door of the stable till it gave way, and out she marched. The old woman would not have known anything about it, but she heard an awful scream, and, looking out of her window, she saw a little child on the ground crying, and Hilda proudly

walking down the street. The child's mother had seen Hilda knock it down and was very angry. She would like to have beaten the headstrong goat, but Hilda had to be caught first.

The old woman told them a kind of fairy tale, too, about a beautiful white woman who used to come to the village and dance so well that every one wanted to dance with her. She had a very pretty face with fair hair and light brown eyes, but the strange thing about her was that she would never go near a church, and no one knew where she lived. One day some boys followed her tracks in the snow. The footprints grew smaller and smaller till at last they looked more like the hoofs of an animal, and a little further on the boys found—a beautiful white goat!

When they said "Good-bye" to the old woman, they asked if they might see the naughty Hilda, so Fräulein stayed behind to have a chat, and the old woman's grandson was called to bring out the goat.

Hilda was a little disappointing. She looked very like just an ordinary goat and she didn't do anything amusing or naughty.

On the way home Nickie complained to Fräulein about Hilda, how dull she had been. "What a pity you can't understand goat language," said Fräulein.

"Why?" asked Jean.

"Because then you would have heard all sorts of things."

"Oh, do tell us," they begged, for when Fräulein smiled like that it generally meant a story. "What would Hilda have said?" asked Cicely.

"Well," said Fräulein, "Hilda first of all wanted to grumble about the winter. She is a terrible grumbler and uses very bad goat words. 'How would you like to be shut up all the winter,' she says, 'with four other goats in a dull little back stable?' She is sure you would try and get out and go for a little walk by yourselves. She thought the old woman made an absurd fuss about such a small thing, just a little promenade up the village street on a fine afternoon. She hadn't seen the sun for days, and where was the harm?"

"But she needn't have knocked the baby down," said Erica.

"Well, Hilda says the silly little thing shouldn't have got in her way," Fräulein continued, "and she only gave him a little push with her horns, and over he went, making a horrible noise."

"But isn't Hilda always in the stable?" asked Jean.

"Oh, no," Fräulein answered. "In summer all the goats go up into the mountains; they start early in the morning

and they don't come home till the sun goes down. There are lots of goats in the village, and quite early they are collected by a boy who takes them up to the higher slopes, where they find all sorts of delicious things to eat. Hilda says she gets so terribly tired of the winter food; it is so dull and monotonous, but in the summer she can find just her favourite herbs to eat. The goats have a real picnic up in the mountains and I wish you could see them all coming home in the evening. Each goat wears a bell so you can hear them coming from afar, and when they get to the village each finds her own home."

"Tell us some more about Hilda," begged Nickie.

"Hilda says," continued Fräulein, "that the old woman might leave twenty delicious dinners out in summer time and she would never touch them. She gets just what she likes to eat up the mountains, and the stable door might be left open too, she does not want to go out when once she is home from the picnic. All she asks for is a little more change in winter."

"Poor Hilda," said Nickie.

"What else," begged Jean.

"Well, nothing else," said Fräulein, "except that she wishes she had been loose when the Brownies came to see her, because she would like to have had a game with them,

it would have been fun to butt them all over, if they didn't think that too rough."

"Let's go back and see her again," Cicely suggested, but Fräulein said it was tea time and they must hurry home.

VII

SKI-ING

TOBOGGANING was fun and so was skating and building snow castles. You can't help enjoying yourself when you are playing out of doors all day with a jolly sun shining. Also when he gets tired of shining for a bit, and a snowstorm comes on, it is fun watching it from the windows, and rushing out directly it has stopped, to snowball or help clear the skating rink. It is all fun in Switzerland, but the best of all is ski-ing.

"I do wish we two could ski," sighed Jean.

"I am sure we shouldn't tumble like the two new ladies," said Nickie.

"Don't talk any more, please," asked Jean. "I shall make up some poetry."

When Fräulein and the others came in from ski-ing Jean recited:

"Oh, darling Fräu,
It's not a toy
For which we plead;
But don't you see
It's a pair of ski
We need.
We do indeed."

She put a great deal of pleading expression into it and they could see that Fräulein was rather impressed. Mother had to hear it, too, when she came in.

It really seemed to have done some good, for at tea Fräulein told Mother that she had seen two very small pair of ski in a shop window, and she thought they could be hired for Jean and Nickie. She went on to say she hoped Mother would allow them to ski, and told her about the little boy they had seen being taught by his father. At last Mother gave in and said they might all ski together if Fräulein would teach the two youngest.

"Hurrah!" cried Jean; and Nickie gave Mother a hug. It was most exciting, and with Fräulein to help, Nickie knew she wouldn't feel afraid.

That evening in bed Jean made up another rhyme,

"What a sight there'll be to see!
Four of us will be on ski;
Erica and Cicelee,
Little Nicolete and me."

The next morning when the four of them appeared on the ski-ing slopes, Peter was already there. "Here come the Brownies!" he cried, and lots of people stopped to watch them, for they looked rather like four little brown elves.

Ski-ing looks easy, at least it does when people ski well for they might be skimming over the snow like birds. But the first day Jean and Nickie found it very difficult. The ski were so long and awkward and kept getting across each other and terribly in their way. The children tried to lift them up and walk, but Fräulein kept calling out, "Slide, Slide," and at last they got into the trick of sliding them along the snow instead of lifting them up. Peter was very jolly, he came and "gave them a lead" as he called it, which was making an easy track for them to follow.

"HERE COME THE BROWNIES!" HE CRIED

Nickie didn't fall as much as Jean, even when Fräulein didn't hold her hand. Cicely said it was because she was so near the ground already, but Peter vowed she was going to make a first class ski-er.

There were lots of other beginners on the slopes and it was very amusing to watch them. The two new ladies, who had fallen so much at first, now had a guide to teach them and were getting on much better. The Brownies were most interested in a girl called "Woolly Winnie." Of course this was not her real name but people out in Switzerland are always giving nicknames. Woolly Winnie was rather older than the Brownies and thought herself very grown-up. Her mother had never been to a winter sport place before and had bought her daughter clothes at a shop where they didn't understand what was wanted for ski-ing. Winnie wore a coat and skirt of knitted wool which had been brushed to make it extra fluffy, she had woollen stockings and a woolly scarf and cap. Nickie couldn't help rather admiring her, for the woolly clothes were a pretty blue and the scarf and cap a brilliant yellow. Jean, too, owned that "Woolly Winnie" looked rather gay.

"Wait till you see her fall down in the snow," said

Fräulein. "She may look all right on the rink but woolly things don't do for ski-ing."

Woolly Winnie had been rather boastful. She had told the children she was sure she would be able to ski away at once. She could drive a motor car and that was far more difficult than ski-ing. So you may guess the Brownies were not very sorry when they saw her have a big tumble as soon as she started off. The snow was fresh and soft and she went in so deeply that she had a bother to get up, and Erica went and helped her. The Brownies kept falling too, but when they got up, all the snow fell away, because their clothes were so smooth; but poor Woolly Winnie had a harder struggle every time because more and more stuck to her things. It caked on in great slabs, and at last got so heavy that she was tired out and so hot she had to go home. She was almost crying and not a bit boastful now; and she told Erica the snow had gone right through her woolly clothes and she was quite wet. "Mother said how funny and ugly your ski-ing clothes looked," she told her, "but they are much more sporting and I wish she would get me some like them."

At lunch that day Fräulein told them that at one time ski-ing wasn't known in Switzerland. "When my father was a boy," she said, "no one had seen a pair of ski. You

may guess the difference this made, for when once the snow had fallen it was very difficult to get about. People who lived in isolated places used to be very cut off when winter came. Then the Swiss always hoped there would not be much snow, but now, the more snow there is the better."

"Why can't people get about in snow?" asked Jean.

"Because it is too deep," Fräulein answered. "If you sink in right up to your waist, it is difficult enough to get out of it and you couldn't possibly go on." Then she went on to tell the children how, in the old winters, people used to get snowed up in their houses and couldn't get away till the snow melted or someone dug out a track. If they lived away from the village, they had to do without the things they bought at shops. Her father had once been snowed up for over a week. Fortunately it was at a farm and they had milk, butter, potatoes and macaroni, so they were not so badly off. One thing, as a rule, it does not snow for very long, and when it stops, and the fine weather comes, the snow shrinks and hardens and can be trodden down to make paths. Now many villages have a snow plough to beat down and level the roads. This is a big wooden sledge which has a pointed front to sweep the snow to the sides, and is heavy enough to flatten it on the road.

"Who invented ski-ing?" asked Erica.

"It came from Norway," Fräulein said, "and the Norwegians had used ski for a long long time." Then she went on to tell them that at first only the Swiss men had used ski, and when the women began, they had ski-ed in long skirts, which were funny looking and dangerous. And directly ski-ing began in Switzerland, crowds of English people came for winter holidays. A few had been before for the skating and tobogganing, but it is ski-ing which has attracted so many.

"How glad you must be that you are alive now, Fräulein," said Jean, "when there is ski-ing in Switzerland."

"I'm glad I am alive now English people come to ski," said Erica.

"I'm glad I am alive now women ski," said Cicely.

"I'm glad I am alive when they wear knickerbockers," said Jean.

"And I'm glad I am alive with Fräulein," said Nickie.

She was rather surprised that they all laughed, but Fräulein squeezed her hand and she and Nickie gave each other a smile.

VIII

THE BAD BLACK MAN

"THE bad black man will come and get you," said Anna to Nickie, who wouldn't eat her breakfast. Nickie was generally a good-tempered little thing, more ready to laugh than to cry, but this morning everything was going wrong and there seemed nothing to laugh about. When her porridge was put in front of her, she didn't feel as if she could touch such horrid stuff. "I can't eat it," she

cried, as she pushed it away, "and I won't, I won't!" and then she burst out crying.

"Boo, boo, boo," cried Cicely, imitating her and pretending to squeeze out such big tears that she had to catch them in a saucer.

"Who is the bad black man?" asked Jean.

"He is some one who comes to fetch away the naughty children," said Anna.

"What about the sprat, then?" said Cicely. "We shall have to hide her," and she tried to cover Nickie up with her table napkin and upset the milk jug.

"Perhaps he will fetch some one else," suggested Anna rather pointedly, mopping up the milk.

"What is he like?" asked Erica.

"He is quite black," Anna told them, "black all over, with gleaming white eyes. He wears a tall black hat and carries a roll of wire to catch the children. He has a bunch of fir branches to beat them with, and a ladder to get in at the window."

Cicely's fun and Anna's thrilling description of the bad black man had interested Nickie so much that she had quite forgotten her tears. "When does he come?" she asked.

"Whenever any one is naughty," said Anna, "when chil-

dren are disobedient or impudent or mischievous . . . or . . ." looking at Nickie's porridge, "when they won't eat good food."

Nickie looked a little grave and took a spoonful. It was not so bad after all, for Jean had made a little lake of milk on which floated a tiny crust of a ship.

"I should love to see that bad black man," said Erica. "I should ask him how he liked being so black in such a white country."

"You are a funny girl," said Anna. "Swiss children don't want to see him, they are terribly frightened if they meet him."

"We shouldn't be frightened of anything out here," said Cicely; "only nice things seem to happen in Switzerland."

Nickie felt quite happy again after breakfast, and as they were going upstairs, Cicely whispered to her that she would show her something. When they were going along the passage to their rooms, she opened a door and pulled Nickie inside. It was a bathroom. "The taps are such fun," said Cicely; "see me turn them on," and leaning over the side of the bath, she pushed and pushed till out came a spout of cold water.

"Now I'll turn on the hot tap," she said. It seemed very clever to Nickie, for after one twist, out came steaming hot

water. But Cicely hadn't finished. "Wait a minute," she said, "this will be really fun," and with a little struggle and then a jerk, she turned on another tap, and down came drops of water from above, quite a little shower, just as if it were raining from one spot. Nickie shouted; this was a splendid game. "Mind you don't get wet," cried Cicely, pushing Nickie's head under the shower. Then they held their hands under it and let it splash right up their sleeves. When they got tired of this, Cicely tried to turn the taps off, for the bath was nearly full. But the taps were stiff, and when you are not quite sure which way to turn, it is very difficult, and Cicely found she couldn't manage them. Then they heard Mother calling, so the best thing seemed to go at once and not keep her waiting.

Mother wanted them to get ready to go out ski-ing, and Fräulein was not coming all that day because she had gone to a wedding. Nickie hoped that Cicely would tell Mother about the taps and the running water. And when Cicely said nothing she began to feel very frightened. Suppose the bathroom got full of water. Suppose it all rushed out and along the passage and burst into their room. Suppose they were all drowned. But there was no time for any more supposings, for there was a big commotion in

the passage, and they could hear Paula calling out, "O weh! O weh!" which means "Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

Although the water had not burst in their door it was flowing like a small river in the passage and even running down the stairs. Paula had got her feet wet turning off the taps, and other servants were helping her mop up the water. Some visitors had come out of their rooms to watch and were asking whoever could have left the taps on. "Not the Brownies surely!" they said. It was a terrible mess and there was a terrible fuss about it.

Of course, they were soon found out. Their wet hands and arms told tales of them. Mother was really angry with Cicely, but more for not telling her than for what she had done. It was mean and cowardly she explained, which was just what Cicely hated being said of her. Nickie was scolded too, and called Nicolete, but she was allowed to go out with the others, and Cicely, as a punishment, had to stay in.

They went on to the Nursery slopes to practise ski-ing, and were enjoying themselves, when all at once Nickie had a shock. There, quite close to them, stood the bad black man. He was just as Anna had described, with his curly wire, his bunch of fir branches, and there was the ladder over his shoulder. Jean was a little frightened, but

Erica laughed. "Why, here's a sweep," she said; "how funny he looks on the white snow." But Nickie clutched hold of her hand, she had never seen a sweep before, and to her it was no laughing matter. She could only think it was the bad black man come to fetch Cicely, and with a tremble in her voice, she called out, "You shan't have our Cicely, you shan't have her." Of course, the sweep didn't understand, so he just stared at her and went off, probably to sweep a chimney.

Mother came to fetch them in to luncheon, and Nickie was glad to go. She felt frightened. It was all very well for Erica to laugh at Anna's tale, but she wanted to get home and find her naughty sister safe and sound. She ran on and rushed upstairs crying out for Cicely. There was no answer and all the rooms were empty. When the others came, they hunted everywhere, but there was no sign of Cicely. At last even Mother seemed puzzled. "I left her cleaning her skates in this room," she said. "Wherever can she be?"

Poor Nickie felt miserable. She knew where Cicely was: taken away by the bad black man, of course, for being naughty. What was the good of hunting for her?

"Perhaps she has gone out," Erica suggested hopefully;

but they found her boots and her coat, so that was impossible.

"Don't cry, darling," said Mother to Nickie, "she is sure to be all right, and we shall soon find her, we'll look all over the house."

"Let's begin with the kitchen," suggested Jean. Mother thought it a funny place to go to, but there was never any knowing what Cicely would do, so down they all went.

Outside the kitchen door they heard some one saying, "O weh! O weh!" just like Paula, and then there was a big burst of laughter. Inside they saw Cicely with a meringue in her hand and a smear of cream on her cheek, talking to a big white man. At least he was dressed all in white, with a high white cap. He was the chef who did all the cooking and he was smiling all over his round face and the other people in the kitchen were laughing too. Instead of being fetched away by a bad black man, that impudent Cicely had found a kind white man, and she had been making him laugh by imitating Paula, and although she couldn't speak Swiss, she had somehow made him understand all about the bath and the taps.

Mother was so glad to see her naughty little daughter again that she forgot to be cross. Nickie was so delighted to find her Cicely safe that she dashed across the kitchen

and up into Cicely's arms. I think she would have cried again, but there wasn't a chance, for Cicely pushed the last bit of meringue into her mouth, saying, "There, Sprat, don't make a fuss." So she swallowed it down with the tears and smiled instead.

IX

SKI-JUMPING

FRÄULEIN was always thinking of nice things to do. One afternoon she took the children to see ski-jumping. Some boys had made a jump beyond the village on the hill-side where they practised after school was over. The children had often asked about ski-jumping, and how people could possibly jump with ski on their feet; so as the pictures of it don't make it at all clear,

Fräulein was anxious they should see ski-jumping for themselves. Jean made a poem for the occasion:

"Clever Fräu,
We do enjoy
The treats you're always giving us.
We wish you'd come
To our English home
And there be always living with us."

"Well, really Jean," protested Cicely, "you are getting worse and worse, home doesn't rhyme with come."

"It does all right when it's written," said Erica.

"Never mind," said Fräulein, "it's a kind little rhyme and I wish I could answer in verse and tell Jean how much I should like to 'come to her English home and there be always living with you,' but somehow I can't be happy for very long away from Switzerland." And Fräulein went on telling them how many Swiss people, when they left Switzerland, got terribly homesick and longed to be amongst their mountains again.

The way to the ski-jump was all up hill, along a narrow road with deep soft snow on either side; then through a little hamlet where old men were busy sawing up firewood just outside their doors. The snow was heaped up in banks to make room to work. After this the track got steeper and

narrower, and Fraulein led, with the children following in single file, pulling their two toboggans after them on which they would be able to ride all the way back. A little further, and there were the boys on the steep hill-side. They looked like little dolls from the distance, but such active and lively ones: shouting to each other and treading the snow down with their ski below the jump.

The jump itself looked like a big hump of snow, jutting out from the hill. The boys would climb up some distance above it to get a good start, then, throwing away their sticks, ski down fast to the jump and take a leap off it into the air, landing further down the hill. If they reached the ground on their feet they would just ski on down very fast and turn round. Sometimes, however, they fell as they landed; one even turned head over heels and slithered on down the slope, a regular mix up of arms and legs and body that you only got a glimpse of in a cloud of snow. But as soon as he came to a stop at the bottom the arms and legs quickly sorted themselves, for their owner had to get out of the way of the next jumper as soon as he could. When a boy jumped and "stood" as it is called, the others measured the distance to see how many yards he had been able to cover.

The children loved watching and Fräulein told them to pick out the boy they thought jumped best. It was rather like a game and they wouldn't tell each other their favourite. Nickie soon made up her mind about hers. He was not the biggest of the boys but he took the longest jumps. It was wonderful to see him fly down the hill and then leap right into the air. He landed much further down than any of the others, and he never seemed to fall. She noticed too that when the boys measured his distances there was generally a shout.

When they had nearly finished, Fräulein asked which was the best jumper, and Erica and Cicely at once pointed out Nickie's favourite. "Why, he was mine, too," said Jean. "And mine as well," said Nickie. "He takes such big brave jumps," said Cicely. "And never seems to fall," said Erica.

Fräulein, it seemed, knew all about him. "He is the best boy ski-er in this village," she told them. "His name is Rudi and you never see him without a pair of ski on his feet. He is a clever boy and very keen to learn languages. I used to teach him English and he got to speak quite well."

When the jumping was over, the children begged Fräulein to speak to Rudi.

"I wish you would get him to come and talk English to us," asked Cicely.

"I am afraid he may be shy," said Fräulein.

"But surely, he can't be frightened of us," said Erica, "when he can face that awful hill."

"It's different, isn't it? But we will try," Fräulein agreed, and she beckoned Rudi to come down to the road. It was wonderful to see him skimming downhill over the snow, "like a swallow," as Jean said. And really he did seem to fly. In fact he came so fast that Nickie was alarmed that he was going to run right into them; but he suddenly turned, and with a little jump, stopped dead.

"Well done!" called Fräulein, "that was a turn I wanted the children to see," and then she went on talking about ski-ing for a little, to give Rudi time to get over his shyness.

At first he would only talk to Fräulein in Swiss, but she always answered him in English; and soon Cicely made him speak to her by asking him which he learnt first: talking or ski-ing. The others laughed, and when Rudi saw a broad smile on Nickie's little face, he laughed too. This broke through his shyness and soon they were all chatting together as if they had known Rudi for years.

Fräulein told them afterwards that Rudi was a regular Swiss; they may be a little shy at first but when that is past, they are very natural and unselfconscious and treat people like old friends.

X

THE TRACKS OF ANIMALS

THE children were delighted to have Rudi to talk to them, they had all begun to like him. Fräulein told them he knew a lot about the animals that live in the mountains, which she was sure would interest them, for although it seemed all so quiet and empty, there were many animals living active lives up there which were never seen by the visitors.

Rudi told them first about the marmots. "But you wouldn't see them in winter," he said, "because they are asleep then. They are furry little animals that live up in the mountains all the summer, but directly the autumn comes they curl up rather like dormice, and go to sleep for the winter."

"But don't they have anything to eat?" asked Jean.

"I think I should wake them up and feed them," said Cicely. But Rudi went on to explain that they must not be woke up even to have a meal. In fact, if they are disturbed in their long winter sleep they die. When the spring comes they are often very thin and weak, but they soon get strong and fat again. They are very shy of people and when they see some one coming, they give a shrill whistle, which is their signal for danger.

"But one of the most beautiful animals is the chamois," said Rudi. "It is like a deer, so graceful and so fleet. If you could only come to our farm one day I might be able to show you one through the telescope. These chamois only come down near people's houses when the winter is severe and the snow has buried their food very deep. Usually they live high up on the mountains. When they venture down to look for bilberry shoots or lichen they come very cautiously, for they are shy and timid animals.

The hunting season begins in the autumn, when men go off into the mountains to shoot the chamois. It is not easy, though, for they are far better climbers and jumpers than any man and can often get to places where it is impossible to shoot them."

"And a good thing, too," said Nickie.

Then Rudi went on to tell them of the foxes that live in the mountains, and sometimes when their food is short, come down and steal a chicken or two from the farms. People go off in the autumn to hunt them, and he had two or three skins of the foxes which his father had shot.

"Shot!" exclaimed Erica. "Do they really shoot foxes in Switzerland?"

"Well, how else should we kill them?" asked Rudi.

"Why we hunt them on horseback," Erica explained. "We hunt hares like that too."

"Well, that would be impossible over here," said Rudi; "no horses could gallop over our mountains. But I wish you could see one of our white hares; they are very pretty, quite white with just two black marks on their ears. There was one close to here this morning."

"Did you see it?" asked Cicely.

"No, but I saw its track."

"What is that?" asked Nickie, so Rudi told her that the

tracks left by animals in the snow could tell most interesting stories, and suggested they might like to go and see the marks made by the hare.

Fräulein was glad for them to go, and it was not far from the road, though in rather deep snow. When they reached the spot Rudi was very interested, for now there were two distinct tracks: one made by a hare and another near it which he told them belonged to a fox.

"I expect that fox has been after my little hare," he said.

"I hope he didn't catch it," remarked Nickie.

"Supposing the poor fox was hungry," teased Cicely.

"I am sure the hare must have been hungry," said Rudi. "It had tried to find some growth on the rock and had even nibbled a bit of bark off the tree. A hare's track is very easy to tell, you can't mistake the two dots side by side and the two in front. A fox is not as easy, his track often looks like that of a dog or a chamois. The squirrel's you know by the fluffy mark made by the tail."

"And are there any wild animals in the mountains?" asked Jean. Nickie was glad when Rudi said "No, not now, though at one time there were wolves and bears."

"I felt sure there would be bears," Erica remarked,

"because you are always seeing them in pictures or carved in wood." Rudi agreed and said:

"You would see some live ones in the pit at Berne."

"You are quite right, Erica," Fräulein explained, "the bear is our national animal, just as the lion is English; but we don't have wild bears now and you don't have lions in England.

"It would spoil Switzerland, wouldn't it, if there were fierce animals like tigers and crocodiles and wolves in the mountains?" said Cicely.

"But it would be great fun to hunt them," said Rudi.

Every one was quiet for a minute. The sun had set and the snowfields looked violet. Already tiny lights were twinkling in the village below. The Brownies had never been out so late before and Fräulein said they must really start back. They all got on to the two toboggans,—Fräulein squeezing in with Jean and Nickie,—and after many "Adieus," Rudi gave them a good push off, and away they went through the frosty air at a great pace, soon reaching the chalets where the men had been chopping wood. They all shouted "Achtung" together and the peasants stepped out of the way to let them pass. Then gently on, almost to the hotel door, where Mother and a party of ski-ers watched them arrive.

XI

THE TOBOGGAN RACE

ALL four children practised tobogganing. They went over rough and smooth snow and Jean and Nickie always kept together. Fräulein often took them out alone and coached them, for she was very pleased with the way Jean was getting on. Nickie, too, learnt how to lean over and steer with her body when they were going round corners. Erica and Cicely were very

interested and keen for them to win, although Cicely teased and said she was sure they would win from the wrong end.

"That would be awful," said Erica; "we should all feel disgraced."

"Don't be such a goose," scolded Mother. "Why, it wouldn't matter a scrap, some one must lose, and if they do their best their is nothing to worry about. It is unsporting to talk like that about losing."

When the day of the race arrived the weather was brilliant: bright and very frosty. "It will be fast going," remarked Jean. "Perhaps too fast for a little fatty like you," said Erica. But Jean just smiled and said that if you were going to be bumped off it was better to be too fat than too thin.

The races began at two o'clock. Nickie was surprised when she found they were to race on a narrow track. She had imagined that in a race every one would start at once, but the last bit of the grown-up's run had been lent for the children's race, and there was only room on it for one toboggan at a time. If they had tried to pass each other there would have been a smash. A gentleman stood at the top to start them by counting: "Five,—four,—three,—two,—one," and another waited at the

end of the run for them to arrive, and who did the run in the shortest time won the race.

"Five,—four,—three,—two,—one," shouted the starter, and off slid two children. How well they went, thought Nickie. If only she and Jean could go like that. The next two, however, were not so lucky. One of them rather lost her nerve at the steepness of the track, and clapped both feet suddenly to the ground. Round spun the toboggan and off fell both children. They were quickly helped off the track to make way for the next two.

At last the exciting moment arrived when it was the Brownies' turn. There was rather a fuss at first, as a lady said Nickie was too small and it wasn't safe. For a minute Nickie's heart sank and she was terribly afraid she would be stopped, but luckily Fräulein had come to the starting place with them and she made it all right. She explained to the nervous lady that Nickie had done quite a lot of tobogganing and that Jean was careful and there was not likely to be an accident.

A gentleman put their toboggan on the track and they got on. You may guess they both felt rather breathless with excitement, but Jean would not be hurried and made Nickie get quite comfortable before starting. Then "five,—four,—three,—two,—one!" counted the starter,

THEY GOT AROUND THE CORNER WITHOUT A HITCH

and off they went like the wind. As they drew near the first corner, Jean put her feet gently and gradually to the ground, just dug one heel in while she and Nickie swayed over their bodies. This slowed down their pace, but it got them round the corner all right. Then came another bend, and although they went sideways up the bank, they got round it quite safely and quicker than the last. After that was a more level and straighter stretch and Nickie was able to get her breath. But the worst corner was yet to come: a regular hairpin bend, and rather nasty because the snow was banked so very high each side of it. It was so shut in as to be almost like a tunnel. You couldn't see any one or anything but snow. Nickie didn't like the look of it at all, and to tell the truth neither did Jean, but she knew they must do their best. "Sit tight," she said to Nickie, and held her a little closer.

Just as they were nearing the nasty bend, they heard a voice call, "All right, all right!" and a head looked over the bank. It was Rudi. He knew it was the worst bit of the track and he had climbed up thinking he might encourage them. And it did, for all Jean's courage came back and Nickie felt quite safe again. They got round the corner without a hitch and with hardly

touching the ground with their feet. The rest of the way was quite easy; there were no more bends and they could already see the people and hear the clapping.

Quite a crowd was waiting to see them come in, and Mother, Erica, and Cicely were there. They were looking so pleased and Nickie caught sight of Fräulein in the distance running down the hill. A gentleman shook hands with Jean and told her he could not say for sure but he rather thought they had won the race. Rudi was there too, standing near and looking rather shy again. Jean soon told Mother how he had helped them and Mother said nice things to him and asked him to go back to tea with them. Nickie was frightfully excited but a very happy little girl.

XII

STRANGE THINGS IN SWITZERLAND

IT had been a very warm morning and the Brownies had been skating hard. They had got on since that first day, and Erica could cut quite a correct figure 8, and although Jean was not as graceful, she had learnt to get on her edges. Nickie could skate round the rink alone now and was even learning to go backwards.

They were feeling rather lazy after lunch, so sat outside the hotel in the shade with Mother and Fräulein.

"What a funny thing it seems," remarked Erica, "that although it is so hot we can't even bear our thin sweaters, yet we have been skating on real ice and surrounded by real snow."

"It's rather sloppy ice just now," said Cicely; "they say the rink will be closed till after tea."

"Yes, but it will be just as hard to-morrow," observed Jean; "it *is* odd when you think of it that there should be ice at all when the sun is so hot."

"Why is it?" asked Nickie innocently. She quite thought Fräulein knew everything.

Fräulein smiled and told them that the Swiss make their ice rinks very carefully. One layer is flooded over another, so that the whole bulk of the ice is solid, and what is called "sun-proof." "If that rink had been a lake with just a crust of ice on the top of it," she explained, "it would have melted long ago with this strong sun. Your asking about the sun and ice has given me the idea for a new game: every one must think of something strange out here in Switzerland, something that you don't see in England. If possible you must give reasons for its strangeness."

"I know what I shall say," cried Cicely.

"I wish I did," sighed Jean.

"Now, Erica, you start," said Fräulein.

"Well, the sleighs are strange to us," Erica began. "Over here everything, even perambulators, are on runners instead of wheels.

"Now you have given me an idea," said Jean, "I think it is strange to see dogs drawing carts, and to-day I actually saw an old mother cow harnessed to a sleigh. It was strange to us because in England we only have horses and donkeys to pull things."

"Now, Cicely," said Fräulein.

"There are such a heap of things I don't know where to begin," she said. "First of all the ground is white everywhere instead of dark, and there is snow on everything, big lumps on the roofs that stick there all the time and don't melt off like our snow does. Then there are the great white mountains peaking right up into the sky."

"I wondered when one of you would mention the mountains," remarked Fräulein.

"And the wooden chalets, with the verandahs," Cicely went on, "and all the wood stacked up outside them. It's rather funny too, but very nice, I think, to have the

cows living in the flat beneath you. I should like to live in the same house as horses and I shouldn't mind a few goats there, too."

"And now you, Treasure," said Fräulein to Nickie. "What have you thought of?"

Instead of listening, Nickie had been busy thinking, so she was quite ready. "A piece of cake in bed is a funny thing," she said.

"A piece of cake!" exclaimed Fräulein, very puzzled.

The others laughed and Erica explained that they always called the wedge shaped bit of mattress that went under the pillow the "piece of cake" because it was just the shape of a slice.

"I have thought of one more thing," said Cicely; "those trees down by the river; we never see such pretty looking trees in England."

"Yes," said Jean, "there is snow all over them,

"Whoever saw such wonder trees
Covered with snow so fine as these!"

"I am sorry to spoil your little couplet," said Fräulein, "but it is not snow that covers the trees, it is rime. The mist that rises from the river clings round the trees

and then comes the frost and freezes it on. That is why it is all over alike."

"Why here comes Peter," Jean called out.

"Come along, Peter," said Erica, "and play a new game called 'Strange Things in Switzerland.' You are just in time to take your turn."

They told him some of the things the others had thought of. "I wonder whatever else there can be," Jean remarked.

"Now Peter, begin," commanded Cicely.

Peter didn't need telling twice. "I've just made a discovery," he said, "and a very strange one. It is a kind of icicle house near the big hotel at the end of the village."

"What do you mean by an icicle house?" asked Erica.

"Well, it looked as if it were made of ice," Peter answered; "smooth ice all over it, running down the sides to icicles. And if you go round to the back of it you see—but I shan't tell you any more, you must come and look at it yourselves." Then turning to Mother, he asked, "May they come with me this afternoon?"

Of course Mother said "Yes." They all liked Peter, he was such a jolly little boy, and as he was an only child he had no one to play with. Fräulein said they

would all love to go and see the icicle house, and they would get ready at once. Mother told Peter he must come back to tea with them and she would be very interested to hear all about it and what they had found the other side.

XIII

THE ICE CAVE

WHILE they were getting ready to go with Peter, Nickie slipped back. "Do tell me," she begged, "what was the other side of the icicle house?"

"Promise you won't tell," said Peter, and then he whispered in her ear, "An ice cave."

And while they were all talking to Mother before starting Nickie kept thinking about the ice cave. She

remembered what Jean had told her of the snow fairies who lived in caves. She could quite imagine them playing about and dancing just outside, and then flying back among the icicles directly any humans came near. Very likely, even when Peter had been standing looking at the icicle house, they had been hiding in the cave laughing at him. She would have peeped in. What fun to catch a glimpse of them. She would love to see them going to sleep and pulling the snow blanket over them. She wondered what clothes they wore. She rather fancied silvery, lacey ones like the rime on the trees, but perhaps their frocks had to be made of goats' hair to keep out the damp.

Nickie got so excited thinking she might find some fairies that she could hardly keep still to have her coat and cap put on. Mother wondered to see her so impatient, and when she kissed her she asked what was the matter.

"Nothing," Nickie told her, "only nice thoughts," and then she put her arms round Mother's neck and whispered, "Supposing there are fairies there, what shall we do?"

"Why, bring them back to tea, of course," said Mother, laughing.

On the way Jean asked Nickie, "What did Mother mean, bring back whom to tea?" and Nickie told her what she had hoped about the fairies. Then they both asked Fräulein to tell them quite truthfully what she thought, whether perhaps they would see some fairies there. Fräulein, however, couldn't be a bit sure. "It would be such fun to ask them to tea, wouldn't it?" Jean suggested, and Nickie wondered what fairies would have to eat.

It was rather a long way to the cave, but Fräulein told them tales about the mountain dwarfs, who are rather like fairies. They are supposed to be little men with long ears who wear tight clothes and caps. They are said to live in the mountains and often do very mischievous things. They are very sharp, and they find out if a person is mean or horrid in any way, however nice he may seem; and they pay him out.

Once they discovered that a farmer was watering his milk. All the children who drank it were getting thinner and thinner and their parents wondered why. But the little dwarfs knew all about it, and one day after the farmer's cows had been milked and the milk was standing in pails, they emptied it all away and filled the pails with water. You may guess how angry the mean

farmer was. He thought his cowman had played him a trick, so he beat him and sent him away. The next morning he milked all the cows himself and he locked the milk up in the dairy. But it is no good trying to lock dwarfs out, they can creep in anywhere, and these got through the tiny window, and again the farmer found all his milk gone and a lot of empty cans standing there. And it was always the same, whatever precautions the farmer took, the dwarfs were always able to get rid of the milk, so that all his customers left him and he began to feel sorry he had been so mean.

These little dwarfs are not always mischievous, though, and there are lots of tales of their helping people and doing them a good turn. Once there was a very long and hard winter and a poor widow woman had used up all her wood. She had cut up a lot and stacked it round her chalet, but the snow and cold had lasted so long that she had used it all and had nothing left to burn in her stove. She was lying in bed and wondering how she should get on without a fire, when she heard a curious noise just outside her house. She thought it was a fox and looked out of the window, but at once the noise stopped and there was nothing to be seen. The next night she heard the same noise, but this

time she didn't look out, for it sounded like chopping wood, and she knew the little dwarfs hate to be seen at work, so she just went to sleep again and the next morning there was a lovely heap of wood at her door.

"And what did she do then?" asked Nickie.

"Why, she made a big fire and cooked herself some breakfast," said Fräulein.

"What did she have?" asked Jean.

"Some delicious hot coffee and some potatoes and fat," Fräulein told them, and then Peter called out to them that they had got to the icicle house but must climb up off the road to see it properly.

The strange thing was that as they were getting near it, they could hear voices. Jean and Nickie were very excited. Whatever could it be, they wondered, and the others looked rather surprised. It was just as Peter had described it, all smooth ice, but it had a funny twirling little tap above it. Peter led the way round to the other side and the voices became more distinct. When they got near they saw a beautiful sight: a real cave, quite blue and hung all over and all round with icicles, and when they looked into the cave they saw, not fairies nor even dwarfs, but two children: a girl

who was knocking off the icicles with her shovel and a boy who was smiling at them.

At first they all stared at each other, and then to every one's surprise Nickie called out, "Will you both come back to tea with us?"

Fräulein laughed at this. She understood that Nickie had been thinking all along of asking the fairies back to tea with them. As she knew the two strange children, she explained to them that they were really invited to tea and every one would be very pleased if they would come. The children turned out to be Swiss but they could speak a few words of English. Their names were Sophie and Rolf and they came straight away with the Brownies.

They were a big party going back and they all liked Sophie and Rolf. They told the Brownies they loved the ice cave and often played in it. They used to help the men who came with sledges to take great blocks of it away. Then Fräulein explained to the children that the icicle house was really an ice-making machine. It makes the ice in winter which is used in summer. It is stored away in cellars and lasts good all those months. There is a spray of water at the top of a wooden structure which is always sprinkling water. This freezes and makes a regular ice house.

Nickie didn't care to hear about an ice-making machine. She liked to think of it as a blue ice cave where, if not exactly fairies, they had yet found two strange children.

Jean made a verse about it,

"We went to find some fairies in a blue ice cave,
We wondered how they'd look and how they would behave,
But what we found were children knocking off the ice,
And we all think Rolf and Sophie are really quite as nice."

XIV

MINNA

ERICA was having a skating lesson and the others were waiting for her to come back, as they were all to go ski-ing together.

"I have something to do in the village," said Fräulein. "Would you three like to come with me?"

"What is the something?" asked Jean.

"I am going to visit some one," said Fräulein, with a twinkle in her eye that somehow encouraged questions.

"A lady or a gentleman?" asked Cicely.

"A lady named Minna," Fräulein answered with a smile.

"Quite grown-up?" suggested Jean.

"Quite," said Fräulein with decision.

"How old?" asked Nickie.

"Just as old as you, Treasure," Fräulein answered.

"There is some joke, I know," said Cicely, "but I should call that a baby and not a lady."

"Well, come along," said Fräulein, "we will go and see what Minna is really like."

Not far from the village they came to an old brown chalet with a flight of wooden steps leading up to the first floor. Fräulein ran up and knocked at the door and a man came out and talked for some time. The Brownies wished they could understand, for they heard "Minna" mentioned several times. Then the man came down and went to the door below. "He has gone to fetch Minna," said Fräulein, and when he came out he was leading—a cow!

The children were a little startled at first, for the cow was big with huge horns, and as she stepped out of the stable she gave a loud "Moo." But she stood so quietly that soon Jean and Cicely got so at home with her that

she let them stroke her silky sides. "We must all have a good look at her," said Fräulein, "because Rudi's mother wants our opinion; she is very likely going to buy her."

Minna was really very gentle and she got nicer and nicer. Her face was quite kind, in spite of her big horns, and she looked at the children as if she would like to talk to them. She was not a bit pleased when the man led her back to her stable and she gave a look round almost asking to stay longer.

"I wish we could buy Minna," said Jean.

"It seems too bad to shut her up in that dark old stable," said Cicely.

"I wish she could have talked to us," sighed Nickie, and looked at Fräulein very pleadingly.

There were not many things Fräulein could refuse Nickie, and she knew quite well what she wanted. "All right, Treasure," she said, "I will pretend to know cow language and tell you all that Minna might have said. First she wished you to know that she doesn't have to stay in her dark stable all the summer, and even in winter she has a short walk every morning and evening when she is taken to have a good drink of water at the trough. When she was younger she used to take this

opportunity for being a little frisky. She would try and go further on, just to see what it was like at the end of the road; or she would dodge the stable door going back, and prance a little instead of soberly walking in.

"But it is only in winter that Minna is kept indoors. Directly the spring comes, she, and all the other cows in the village, are taken higher up the mountains, where they find fresh delicious grasses and herbs to eat. All those empty chalets, where we so often picnic, are open and occupied in summer. Here the cows and the cowherds live for the summer months.

"You may guess how pleased all the cows are when the spring comes, they are so glad to get out that they don't mind the long uphill walk. Minna is a big strong cow and she thoroughly enjoys it. I expect she wanted to tell you that, when she saw you looking at her so sympathetically this morning.

"When the cows are up the mountains, each wears a bell round her neck. The biggest and strongest is chosen for leader and she wears the biggest and deepest sounding bell. She goes first and all the others follow her. If one tried to pass her, she would be very annoyed and would soon punish such impudence with a butt from her horns."

"I should make Minna the leader," said Cicely.

"But it is not the people, but the cows themselves who choose their leader. They fight to see which shall lead. They don't all fight, of course, because many would be too timid, but the big strong ones have it out, and the men and the other cows stand round in a ring. They know they will not really hurt each other, and when once it is settled which is the strongest and most masterful, there is no more quarrelling and all the other cows obey their leader and follow her."

"I should like to see the fight," said Cicely.

"It is a very pretty sight," Fräulein went on, "to see the cows coming down from the mountains in September. It is a long procession and they wind their way slowly down, followed by the cowherds, who have all sorts of odd things slung on their backs: big copper saucepans, concertinas, bundles of clothes, etc. Two of the cows are wreathed in flowers: one is the leader, the other the cow who gives the most milk."

"Do the men live up there with the cows, then?" asked Cicely.

"Yes, they stay the whole summer," said Fräulein; "you see some one has to look after the cows and milk

them. Then there are the cheeses to be made for which the milk has to be boiled in enormous saucepans."

"Then I suppose the cowherds all sleep up there," said Jean.

"Yes," Fräulein told them, "the men sleep on hay which is spread on long wooden bunks."

"I should love to stay up there too," said Cicely.

"But wouldn't it be rather lonely?" suggested Jean.

"I expect the men think it is rather quiet when once the cows have gone to bed," said Fräulein. "Then they all sit in front of the house and sing."

"I should like to hear them," sighed Nickie; "it must be lovely up there." But Nickie didn't understand that it would all be green in summer, and in imagination she had seen the men sitting out and singing in the snow!

"Sometimes the men come down to the village," Fräulein went on. "They meet their friends and have dances. There is an old legend of a mountain which is called the Dead Mountain. It had such beautiful rich grass and herbs growing on it that it was a favourite of the cows, because of its good food. They were able to give a lot of milk, but of course it took longer to milk them. One evening there was a dance down in the village below and the milkers were all in a great hurry to get

away and go to it. But the cows kept them a long time because they had so much milk to give. 'Oh, bother,' the men kept saying, 'we shall miss the best of the dance.' Some of them began grumbling and saying it was all the fault of the mountain which provided too good food for the cows, and in the end they cursed the mountain for being so beautiful and fertile. And from that time all the fresh green pastures withered up, every little plant died and the mountain became bare and desolate. It is the same now, and to this day, nothing, not even the coarsest blade of grass will grow on it."

Erica was running to meet them. She was very excited about an Ice Gymkhana that was to be held the next week. The skating instructor, whom the children always called the Harlequin, had told her about it, and he hoped they would all go."

"But what a pity you have missed Minna," said Nickie.

XV

THE PICNIC

FRÄULEIN often used to take the Brownies for picnics. It seems funny to have picnics in winter, doesn't it? But the sun shines so in Switzerland that you always want to be out of doors. When they were going for a picnic, they always took their lunch with them; every one does in Switzerland. They had to ask for it at breakfast. Erica would say in her best grown-up

manner: "Four lunches, please." Then Anna would give the order to the head waiter, and four paper packets would be waiting for them in the hall, with their names and the numbers of their rooms written on them. They were very interesting packets, and when lunch time came, it was fun opening them. First of all there would be two rolls cut in half and buttered, with meat or ham or sausage, sometimes some biscuits or cake, an apple and an orange, a piece of chocolate, and always a hard-boiled egg.

It was lovely when you were a little tired and hungry to sit out in the sunshine right up in the mountains and eat your lunch. It tasted much better than in a dining-room. It was fun, too, exchanging things. Cicely loved hard-boiled eggs and Jean didn't. Nickie was always glad of an extra bit of chocolate and Erica would exchange anything for an orange.

The day after the Brownies had been to visit Minna, Fräulein said she would take them to see Rudi's mother, and they would make a picnic of it. The paper bags were ordered at breakfast, and as the snow was hard and Jean and Nickie not very good yet at ski-ing, Fräulein decided they should all walk and take a toboggan for the luggage. They always enjoyed the packing up, and

tying the things on. First there were the lunch packets, a thermos with hot milk, then a rug and a cushion for Nickie, Erica's sketching block, Jean's brown wooden bear, who objected to being left behind (so she said), and most important: Fräulein's kodak, for without that no record of the Brownies' holiday could be made.

At last the toboggan was packed up and they were off, all feeling very cheery. It is very inspiriting to be starting off for the day when the weather is so fine, and, like the Swiss, when they feel lively, the Brownies felt inclined to sing.

"Quick, Jean," cried Erica, "think of a verse, and I'll make up a tune to sing."

Jean thought hard, while no one spoke. At last she recited:

"Oh snow, so hard and smooth and white,
We walk upon you with delight,
With sky so blue and sun so bright,
No wonder our spirits feel so light."

And there Jean stuck, but it was quite enough, and they all sang it to a tune Erica made up, that was very like one of Mother's songs.

Jean pulled the toboggan at first, but in a little while she was so hot she had to take off her coat, and very

soon all their coats were packed on to the toboggan and Fräulein and Erica took it in turns to pull it. Although the road was narrow, the snow was hard and the toboggan slid over it quite easily.

Cicely and Jean had let their spirits run away with them and were rather inclined to be silly. They called each other "Charlie" and "John," and walked ahead of the others whispering and giggling together.

About half way to Rudi's Farm a little track turned off the road and led up a steeper bit of the hill. Cicely called out, "John and I are going up there, it's a short cut."

"No, no," cried Fräulein, "wait for us."

When she caught them up she said, "How do you know it is a short cut? It may not lead into our road at all, and anyhow you mustn't go alone."

"But we must," Cicely answered. "Come along, John."

"All right, Charlie," said Jean.

"No," Fräulein insisted, "we must keep together," and Erica told Cicely not to be so rude and silly. Nickie didn't like Cicely and Jean being so naughty when Fräulein was always so nice, it was horrid of them to want to disobey her. She got near Jean and whispered, "Do come with us," but Charlie and John were obstinate and

wouldn't give in. There they all stood staring at each other. At last Fräulein laughed, "All right," she said, "Charlie and John shall go their short cut and lead the way. We shall have to ask them to pull the toboggan because I shall carry Nickie, but we will all follow them. It is the only thing to do, because it is one of the rules of an expedition that the members of a party shall all keep together."

"But there is another rule, isn't there, Fräulein?" asked Cicely, "that says all the members of a party must obey their leader. I know Mother told me about it."

"Quite right," said Fräulein, "and when Charlie and John have learnt to be real sportsmen, they will see the use of rules."

The short cut was steep to start and it soon grew worse. Charlie and John had hard work getting the toboggan along. Then, when every one was very hot and out of breath, it grew narrower and finished in a tiny track leading up to a little barn. Cicely and Jean looked very blank, but Fräulein laughed and said the only thing to do was to turn round and go back.

"Oh, Fräulein, you wretch," cried Erica. "I believe you knew all the time."

"Well," Fräulein answered, "a leader is supposed to know all about the way."

Cicely and Jean dropped behind and were very quiet. There was no more giggling and whispering. Presently when Fräulein stopped to get out her camera they caught her up. "Sorry, Fräulein," said Cicely, "to have been such an idiot," and Jean apologized too and said, "It shan't happen again, Fräulein, darling, and we didn't really enjoy it at all."

"Well, this is nice!" cried Fräulein, "we have got rid of those horrid little boys, John and Charlie, and have our own Cicely and Jean back, now we shall have a jolly picnic." And as they turned the next bend of the road, there was Rudi's home just above them.

Rudi's mother was on the lookout for them, and Rudi and his sister Luisle came down the slope to help them over a little stream. Rudi carried Nickie on his back and Luisle took charge of the toboggan. They all liked Rudi's mother, she was so fat and good-tempered and had a very smiling face. She tried to make them understand that she had heard all about Jean and Nickie winning the toboggan race, and that she was surprised to see Nickie so small, "so klein," she kept saying, which means "so little."

She took them into a big kitchen. A cooking stove stood right out in the middle of the room, rather like a low table, with lots of round holes, on which stood earthenware saucepans. There was a big old sofa against the wall, and from the ceiling hung giant necklaces of sausages and hunks of dried meat. Rudi's mother had just baked some pear bread, which is like cake. She gave them each a slice and made Fräulein and Erica sit on the sofa to eat it.

While Fräulein was talking about Minna, Rudi took the Brownies to see two dear little baby calves which were only a few days old. Then they said "Good-bye" and started off for the chalet where they were going to picnic.

As they were getting near it, there was a sound of music like singing in the distance. They all heard it and wondered what it could be. Nickie thought at once of the men singing when the cows had gone to bed, but then Fräulein had told them no one lived up here in winter. Whoever could it be singing like that? When they reached the chalet, there, to their surprise, they found Sophie and Rolf, sitting waiting for them and singing Swiss songs. They had heard the Brownies

were going to picnic at the chalet, so they had brought their lunch too, and asked if they might join them.

The chalet, itself, was locked up, but there was a lovely place to camp in front of it. A low wooden bench ran along one side and there was a wooden table fixed into the ground, so it was really like a little home. Fräulein made a game of it: she and Nickie were husband and wife, who kept an hotel, and the others were the guests who came in and ordered lunch. They folded the paper bags to look like plates and heaped all the fruit together for dessert. The guests ordered all kinds of things: ices, eggs and bacon, turkey, mince pies, chocolate pudding, etc., and all seemed quite satisfied when they were given a sandwich. It was great fun, especially when Cicely pretended to be a Swiss lady who couldn't understand any English. She kept saying, "Ja, ja, Nein, Nein," and "prachtvoll." When she pointed to a piece of sausage and said "prachtvoll," which means "magnificent," Rolf and Sophie went into fits of laughter, and when she wrung her hands and cried "O weh! O weh!" because Nickie dropped her roll, the others were as bad, and could hardly eat their lunch for laughing. Rolf, too, was very funny, pretending to be an English gentleman

and only saying, "Oh, yes," and "quite, quite," and smoothing back his hair.

After lunch Fräulein made Nickie lie down on her rug and cushion, and while she rested, she talked to the children about the snow.

"What is an avalanche, Fräulein?" asked Erica, "and why is it dangerous?"

"It is really a rush of snow downhill," said Fräulein. "The snow slips and slides down and buries what is below it. Sometimes quite a little thing will start it, even one person ski-ing along a steep slope may cause a big avalanche. On some sides of mountains the snow is always avalanching. You notice what looks like a cloud of white spray in the distance, and if you were near you would see it was an avalanche. When we go home, I will show you a baby avalanche and then you can guess what a big one would be like."

"But why are they so dangerous?" asked Jean.

"Well, supposing tons and tons of snow fell on you," Fräulein answered, "it would kill you, even if you were not crushed you would be suffocated. But there are not many avalanchy slopes about here, and those which might be dangerous are never ski-ed over."

"Is that one of the reasons why no one may go ski-ing alone?" asked Cicely.

"Yes, one of the reasons," Fräulein answered. "Another danger of the snow is frost-bite. It is all right to be out of doors as long as the sun is shining, but when it gets late and cold the thing to do is to keep moving and go home. If your feet, hands or ears get very cold, it often ends in their being frost bitten, which is very serious. I knew a man once who would always go ski-ing alone. People warned him how dangerous it was but he only laughed. One day in coming down a steep bit of hill, his ski struck against a bit of rock. Down he came, and the worst of it was the ski stuck and twisted his leg, so that when he picked himself up, he found he had not only sprained his ankle but also broken one of his ski. There he was miles away from the hotel, with a sprained ankle and broken ski and no one with him to go for help.

"Did he die?" asked Jean.

"No, when it grew late and he didn't return, the people in the hotel sent out two guides and some other ski-ers and at last they found him and carried him home, but one of his feet had got frost-bitten, because he had

been out in the snow so long. That is why it is a rule that all the members of a party shall keep together."

Jean looked rather uncomfortable but Cicely put an arm round Fräulein and said, "I think Charlie and John were terribly unsporting, don't you, Fräulein?"

On the way down they saw two ski-ers, Rudi and Luisle coming to meet them, and they all went back together. Luisle couldn't talk to them but she kept smiling in such a nice way that Nickie liked her almost as much as Rudi. When they got to the village, they said "Good-bye," and Nickie asked her to come to tea one day. She thought Luisle must understand that, but she only smiled again and said "Adieu." I expect Rudi told her what it was on the way home.

XVI

THE AVALANCHE

"COME on," said Cicely, "let's play avalanches."

"But we can't, we're going out with Fräulein," said Jean.

The children were all ready to go out but Mother and Fräulein were busy talking.

"They will be ages yet," remarked Erica.

"I vote we don't wait," Cicely suggested; "let's go on."

And calling to Fräulein that they were just going on ahead, they all started off.

They had played ski-jumping in the bedroom with feather beds. They piled them up on the floor and took flying leaps from the chest of drawers. Mother, however, had not been pleased with this game and soon stopped it. Now they would try avalanches, and real snow would be more fun than feather beds.

They found a place up the road where there was a kind of hole. It had been dug out where the snow was quite four feet deep. "That will do nicely," said Cicely. "Why it's splendid," cried Erica; "we can pretend this is where the unfortunate man had to be dug out."

"Do let me be the unfortunate man," begged Jean.

"All right," Erica agreed, and Jean rolled herself carefully into the hole.

"Oh, no, that won't do at all," cried Cicely. "I never saw anything so feeble. Let me be the man and I will really fall and cover myself with snow."

"Yes, that would be better," said Erica. "Get up, Jean, and let Cicely be the man. Jean and Nickie can be guides and rub his face with snow in case he is frostbitten." Erica and Cicely generally got their own way,

so the game was settled that Cicely was to fall off the bank as near the hole as possible, and Erica, as the leader of the rescue party, should find her. "You mustn't mind lying some time," she said, "because, of course, we can't find you at once; we shall have to look everywhere else first."

"Wouldn't it be a good idea to leave a glove sticking out of the snow?" Cicely suggested, "just to give you a clue."

So the game began and no one but Nickie remembered that they had been going out with Fräulein, and she didn't like to say anything. They pretended to be mountaineers who had left their ski lower down and were climbing a peak. One of them, however, was very headstrong and insisted on following a new track and going off by himself. "I forbid it," said the leader sternly, "you know how dangerous it is to go off alone," but the reckless one wouldn't listen and went his own way. He wandered off and soon paid the penalty for his rashness by being caught in an avalanche which tumbled him over and buried him. The other mountaineers then turned into a rescue party of guides who were searching for a missing man.

Nickie didn't like the game at all. When Cicely

was the man going off alone she had begged her not to, and she hated pretending not to know where she was when all the time they only had to go over to the hole. At the finding of the glove sticking out of the ground, she nearly cried. However, Erica pretended to be very excited at the clue and gave a shout, "Are you there?" But no answer was given.

"Of course, a buried man can't answer," said Erica. "We must dig him out."

However, when they got down the bank to the hole, there was Cicely lying in a strange, quiet way. It was really a horrid game, Nickie thought, and she felt frightened to see Cicely lying so still. Erica, too, was looking rather grave.

"I expect she is only pretending," said Jean. "Shall we rub her with snow?"

"No, I am afraid she has really hurt herself," said Erica. "I wish she would move."

Just as they were wondering whatever they should do, Rudi and another boy came up. They told Rudi all about their game and he looked at Cicely, who still lay as if asleep.

"She must have had a fall," he said. Then he sent the boy off to fetch some one and took off his coat and

put it under Cicely's head. Moving her seemed to rouse Cicely, and before Mother and Fräulein could get there, she had opened her eyes. Nickie was staring at her with such a troubled look on her little face that Cicely's first words were, "Hullo, Sprat! What's the matter?"

Soon she could get up and go home, but she couldn't quite remember what had happened. She thought she had fallen backwards off the bank before she had time to jump off properly. Her head ached so badly that she had to go to bed and have wet handkerchiefs on her forehead. Nickie would have felt very miserable, but Mother invited Rudi to tea, and they all had such a nice cheerful tea that it drove the thoughts of the nasty game out of her head. Mother came in soon and told them that Cicely was much better and her headache had almost gone, and that she sent her love.

Before they had finished tea, the "Indoor Ski-ing Gentleman" came in, and Mother asked him to join them.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, looking round, "where's my indoor ski-ing friend?"

And, of course, he had to hear all about the avalanche game and the accident, and how Rudi had come to help.

Mother remarked how very lucky it was that Rudi

should just have happened to come along at the very right moment. Fräulein noticed that he got rather red and was very quiet, so she asked him how it was that he had come down to the village.

He had to own up that he and his friend had been ski-ing up on the hill, and that he had watched the children playing till he had seen one of them fall off the bank. "It was a long way off," he said, "and they looked such tiny figures that I couldn't tell which it was. However, it didn't take long to ski down, and I found Cicely lying just where I had seen her fall."

So Rudi had been the real rescue party after all.

XVII

THE ICE GYMKHANA

HURRAH! the time has gone so fast, the Ice Gymkhana's here at last," sang Jean.

"I'm not at all glad," said Erica, "it brings to-morrow nearer," and she heaved a deep sigh, for to-morrow was the Brownie's last day.

"Well, I mean to enjoy every bit of to-day," said Cicely. "There will be time enough to cry to-morrow; we don't leave till the afternoon.

"And we can look forward to the nice journey," Nickie suggested, "only I do wish Fräulein were coming with us."

The Ice Gymkhana began at half-past ten, but the children were on the rink before that. All sorts of games and races were going to take place and the Brownies were going in for several. Although Nickie was reckoned too young to compete, she had her skates put on so that she could be down on the rink with the others, as those without skates had to watch from the pavilion.

"Come on, Brownies!" shouted Peter. "I'll race you across on one skate."

Erica took him at his word and beat him. Cicely and Jean were practising running each other along sitting on one of the wooden shovels used by the rink men. They knew this was going to be one of the races. But soon the grown-ups arrived and the Gymkhana began in earnest. Lots of people were there from the different hotels and they sat round cheering their friends. Mother was in several of the races. Once she had to drive two gentlemen blindfolded in and out of a row of bottles without knocking any of them down. And the children shouted when she got through and not a single bottle had fallen.

When the children's races came on, Sophie and Rolf

were almost the best. In the race for speed, twice around the rink, Sophie won, but Peter was second. Then came a very exciting moment for the Brownies, for Jean won the ski and skate race. It was very difficult, as you may guess, because you have a skate on one foot and a ski on the other, and the actions of skating and ski-ing are so different. Your feet want either to ski or skate and not do both at once. However, Jean didn't stand any nonsense from her feet, but made them do what she wanted. She was not very fast, but very careful, and Rolf, who might have beaten her, fell down just before the winning post.

The last item on the programme was called "Free Figure Skating for Couples." A child and a grown-up had to skate together to the band. They could skate in any way they liked, and the couple who gave the prettiest exhibition were to get the prize. It was exciting because the grown-ups chose the children, and the Brownies wondered very much if any one would come and choose them.

Nickie watched to see what would happen. There was the Harlequin, very busy skating about and arranging the couples. Presently he was making his way over to where they were sitting. What fun if he chose one of

HE HARDLY EVER LET GO HER HAND

them. Then a very strange thing happened: he came straight over to Nickie and asked her to come and be his partner.

"But she can't skate well enough," said Fräulein.

"Never mind that," the Harlequin answered, "we can try," and taking Nickie by the hand he led her off to where the other couples were waiting.

I can't tell you how proud Nickie felt. Here was her wish coming true. She was really going to skate with the clever Harlequin. When their turn came she didn't feel at all afraid, although they had to skate before all those people. She had to think hard of the skating because he was always telling her different things to do and he hardly ever let go her hand so she was able to do what he wanted.

When they finished all the people clapped loudly, and the Harlequin made Nickie do a little curtsey on skates. Mother was very pleased and so were the others, and Fräulein said she had heard a special prize was going to be given, and Nickie and the Instructor would get it.

Cicely's partner was the one they always called "the Indoor Ski-ing Gentleman"; he had been a friend ever since she had apologized to him for making a noise over his head in the hotel. While they were skating together

he asked Cicely if she had invented an indoor skating game.

"No," she answered, "I have been too afraid of the people who sleep below."

"What a good thing you didn't try," he said, "because it has been invented already."

"Has it really?" Cicely asked innocently.

"Yes, and it's called Roller Skating."

"Of course," cried Cicely. "I wish I had thought of that first."

XVIII

THE LAST DAY

NICKIE always thought of the last day as beginning the evening before because that was when she heard most about it. "Our last day," they kept groaning, "no more ski-ing, no more skating. Our last day!" There was to be a fancy dress ball, and as it was the last day Erica and Cicely were to stay up for it. Now Jean and Nickie had both won prizes in the Gymkhana, they

said, as it was the last day, it would be too cruel to send them to bed before dinner when the prizes are given away:

Jean went about singing:

"Alas! here dawns the evil day,
When we must quit this paradise.
We weep to think of going away,
And leaving perfect snow and ice."

When the evening came, the Brownies had to help each other to get into their party frocks, as Mother and Fräulein were busy dressing up as Swiss peasants. Erica had just brushed Nickie's hair when they heard Mother calling.

"You go, Sprat," said Erica; "you're finished," and she pushed her out of the room.

The passage was empty, but all the lights were on, and there was nothing to make any one afraid, besides Mother's room was quite close. Nickie didn't feel frightened either, but as she looked down the passage, she had a shock, for coming down the staircase was a ghost! A tall white figure seemed to glide along without making any noise. With a scream Nickie dashed into Mother's room, but there stood a strange man! Poor

Nickie, she was terribly puzzled when Mother's voice said, "Why, don't you know me, Nickie?" and Nickie was soon in the Swiss peasant's arms telling her all about the awful ghost.

As they were talking, Fräulein came in and told them a ghost had come to borrow some safety pins! Mother couldn't help laughing, and Nickie got over her fright, for it didn't sound a bit like a real ghost, and Fräulein explained it was only some one dressed up for the fancy dress ball. When Nickie was brave enough to go and have a look at him, it turned out to be the "Indoor Ski-ing Gentleman." He was dressed in sheets and he needed some pins badly to keep them together.

They went down to dinner early to watch the people come in. When any one looked extra nice or funny everyone clapped. Mother and Fräulein walked in arm in arm. Mother, tall and dark, wore a black stockinette cap drawn over her hair, a blue blouse and baggy trousers, and she looked very handsome. Fräulein, with her fair hair and real Swiss native dress, made a pretty peasant. The Ghost glided in, and there was a Snow Queen, who looked as if she were dressed in snow and icicles. A whole party of people had dressed up to look like vegetables. Nickie liked the Onion best; he

was so round and fat. There were a good many Turkish ladies,—one they said was Bluebeard's last wife,—and a poor gentleman who looked as if he had had a terrible accident: his arm was in a sling, his leg in a splint, his head was bound up and he walked on crutches. Nickie was going to feel very sorry for him, but Erica told her it was only pretending, and he called himself "The Result of the Toboggan Race." There were ever so many more and they kept coming in all through dinner.

It was all so exciting that Nickie almost forgot about the prizes which were to be given away as soon as they had eaten their ice pudding. The grown-ups came first and then the children's prizes were given by a very nice lady, who said something to each person, but it was difficult to hear what she said, as there was always such a lot of clapping. When Jean's name was called, she got rather red, but marched bravely across the room and took a box of chocolates. Then Nickie heard her own name called, but she felt too shy to go and get the prize. It seemed such a long way to walk with so many people looking on. She need not have worried, however, for the nice Harlequin got up from his table and came across to her. He took her hand and together they crossed the

room and took the prize, while all the people clapped and called out, "Bravo, little Brownie!" The prize was a row of little wooden bears skating, and is one of Nickie's greatest treasures.

The next morning Nickie stayed in bed till Anna brought her breakfast and so she heard a secret. She guessed there was something the matter by Mother's manner, and when Fräulein arrived, she, too, seemed rather excited and had a great deal to say. They left Nickie alone for some time, but she had plenty to think about. Only one unhappy thought kept pushing its way into her head, and that was how badly they would all miss Fräulein. Mother had told them they might come again next year, but that was almost as bad as never. She was beginning to feel very sad about it, when Mother came in looking very smiling and cheerful.

"What's the matter?" asked Nickie.

"Just what I was going to ask you," said Mother; "you were pulling such a very long face."

"Tell me your matter first," begged Nickie.

"I am so pleased that Fräulein has at last said she will come back to England with us. She couldn't decide, so we kept it a secret, but this morning she knows she can come, and she hopes to stay till the summer."

"Oh, Mother! how lovely!" cried Nickie. "Do the others know yet?"

"No, only we three. Shall we keep it a secret and give them a surprise?"

"Oh, do let's," said Nickie.

So Nickie had a wonderful secret shared with two grown-ups and felt very proud. It was a difficult one to keep though, because the others grumbled about leaving Fräulein, and when Jean said she should ask for one last story, it nearly burst out.

It was a very busy day; Mother and Fräulein were packing and arranging for the journey and the Brownies wanted to go round and say "Good-bye" to lots of people and places. They were only sorry Rudi's house was too far for them. Mother gave them things to do for her too, and Jean and Nickie were told to take the toboggans back to the shed. Jean wanted to have a last run on hers, so Nickie waited for her, and watched the people on the road. She saw a boy coming along who looked as if he were a good ski-er. To Nickie's delight it turned out to be Rudi. He was in a hurry, as he was going a long errand for his mother, but he stopped to speak to Nickie. When she said "Good-bye,"

he answered "Auf Wiedersehen," which he told her meant "Till we see each other again."

You may guess how pleased the Brownies were when they heard that Fräulein was coming home with them. It would be lovely to have her there, and perhaps they would be able to make her so happy that she would be willing to stay.

Then Mother told them there was another secret and that she and Fräulein had talked things over and decided they would all come again for the summer holidays. With two such nice things, who could grumble any more at its being the last day! Fräulein told them about the summer in Switzerland and the wonderful flowers they would find, and how they could bathe in the lake, and she would teach them to swim, and the lovely picnics they would have up in the mountains.

"Will the snow really be gone?" asked Jean.

"Yes, indeed," said Fräulein, "and everything will be green instead of white, and you will be playing tennis where the skating rink is now."

"And will the mountains be all green, too?" asked Cicely.

"Up the sides, but the peaks of many of them are too

rocky for anything to grow, and some are so high they keep their snow all through the summer."

"Poor Fräulein!" said Erica, putting her arm round her. "Will it be very sad seeing the last of the Swiss mountains from the train?"

"Will you cry?" Nickie inquired sympathetically.

"Nonsense," Cicely broke in, "we shan't let her. Jean will sit on one side of her and recite poetry, and I shall be on the other pushing chocolates into her mouth, and when we get home we shall show her our moors and the sea."

"Besides," Mother added, "we shall all be coming back to her beloved mountains in the summer."

The Brownies left for England in the afternoon and there was quite a crowd at the station to see them off. They had made many friends and people were sorry they were going. Even the lady and gentleman who kept the hotel came, although they were very busy, but the Brownies had been pets of theirs, and they brought them a box of chocolates for the journey. To Nickie, the platform seemed full of people she liked. There was the "Indoor Ski-ing Gentleman" making jokes with Cicely, the Harlequin, Peter, begging them to come again next year, the twins, Sophie and Rolf, saying "Good-bye,

pleasant journey," in English, and in the distance she saw Anna's smiling face. Every one was so nice, it seemed such a pity, she thought, to be going away. But with so much talking and excitement, there was not time to think anything for long.

At last they all climbed up into the high railway carriage and the train was off. "Good-bye, good-bye," they all shouted, but the last words Nickie heard were: "Auf Wiedersehen!"

THE END